

Disordered eating attitudes among Iranian university students of medical sciences: The role of body image perception

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Abstract

Background: Disordered eating attitudes and behaviors have become an issue of worldwide concern. **Aim:** This research was designed to investigate the role of body image satisfaction in the relationship with eating attitudes among students of Qazvin University of Medical Sciences in Iran. **Methods:** In this cross-sectional study, 385 Qazvin university students of medical sciences were recruited by randomized stratified sampling in 2014. The students completed a three-part questionnaire (socio-demographic, Eating Attitudes Test and Body Shape Questionnaire) in their classrooms. We used hierarchical generalized linear models to identify variables significantly associated with Eating Attitudes Test scores. **Results:** The mean age of the students was 21.80 ± 2.98 years. Mean scores for the Eating Attitudes Test and Body Shape Questionnaire were 66.75 ± 29.8 and 11.86 ± 10.97 respectively; 18.5% of students had a score of 20 and above (≥ 20) that indicated disordered eating attitudes or as being at risk of eating disorders. In the multiple regression model, the Eating Attitudes Test was related to screening body image dissatisfaction ($\beta = 0.122$, $P < 0.001$). Body mass index was negatively related to the Eating Attitudes Test score ($\beta = -0.488$, $P < 0.016$), and diet was significantly correlated with an increased Eating Attitudes Test score ($\beta = 5.803$, $P < 0.001$). **Conclusions:** The risk of eating disorders is relatively high among Iranian university students. It can be a warning to health policy makers and should be the focus of special attention. In the present study, the most important factor related to abnormal eating attitudes was body image dissatisfaction. Regarding the complexity of the causes of eating disorders, various preventive and therapeutic interventions are necessary to avoid the dissemination in society of an idealized view of excessive thinness and further unfavorable outcomes in college students.

Keywords

Disordered eating attitudes, body image, obesity, students, self-perception

Introduction

The decreasing age at which body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating attitudes occur in adolescence is of public health concern globally, due to physiological and psychological health problems (Pedro et al., 2016). Prevalence of these disorders doubled during the last two decades in western societies (Mitchison et al., 2012). In psychological terms, eating disorders often begin in adolescence (Farid and Akbari Kamrani, 2016). Eating disorders are the most common type of disorders among teenagers after obesity and asthma (Hosseini et al., 2016). Disordered eating attitudes and behaviors, especially among adolescents and young women, have become an issue of worldwide concern (Musaiger et al., 2013).

Eating disorders and disordered eating on college campuses are a pervasive problem (Ward and Hay, 2015).

Abnormal eating behavior, unhealthy weight control methods and eating-disorder symptoms have risen among college students. The prevalence of disordered eating behaviors is far more than clinical eating disorders in college settings (Rouzitalab et al., 2015). A range of

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